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Statement submitted by Modern Advocacy, Humanitarian, Social and Rehabilitation Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

*The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Facing the Challenges on Social Protection Measures for Social Inclusion within Traditional Societies

Introduction

Social protection measures are rights-based societal prerequisites duly reflected within articles 22 to 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articles 9 to 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 16th December 1996, which State parties and international cooperation are called upon to uphold and enforce.

Social protection measures have also been recently addressed by the 8th ordinary session of the labour and social affairs commission of the African Union, held from 11–15 April 2011 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, under the Social Protection Plan for the Informal Economy and Rural Workers 2011–2015 (SPIREWORK). Under the theme "Promoting Employment for Social Cohesion and Inclusive Growth", the SPIREWORK makes references to key priority area 4 and 10 of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action on Employment Promotion and Poverty Alleviation of September 2004 for "establishing, improving and strengthening the social protection schemes and extending them to workers and their families currently excluded, as well as occupational safety, health and hygiene" and "extending increased coverage of social protection to the informal sector of the economy". It also considers the pressing needs of under employment and labour strategies that seek to give the informal sector necessary support through easing the administrative, legal, fiscal and other obstacles to its growth, and developing an extension of social security and social protection to cover rural and informal workers, as highlighted within the Windhoek Social Policy Framework for Africa of October 2008.

Though with the varying normative frameworks and innovative schemes for better protection of informal and rural workers in Africa and other vulnerable developing countries highlighted within the SPIREWORK, there still exist in-depth worries that need acute consideration with respect to customs and traditions vis-à-vis community social inclusion priorities for men, women, boys and girls and as well, protection measures within the community belief systems.

The Traditional Mind Frame on Gender Roles for Social Inclusion and Protection

Traditional belief systems give the man a dominant and decisive role within family circles, which demands more financial autonomy on his part and undermines the financial potency of the woman, whose social role is better appreciated in humble matrimonial chores. There are exemplary practise in more advanced countries, such as in Finland, where there are important social protection and care institutions, including public child care systems, long maternity and parental leaves and right for to return to the same job after such leaves, thereby, granting the protected possibility of women to meaningfully and equally enjoy both public and private socially inclusive lifestyles. However, these practices differ from those in poorer countries valuing their community traditions.

Gender sensitive and responsive social protection benefits and services for low income countries should be carefully studied and their feasibility within community contextual dimensions, which are connected to prioritized individual and community needs rather copying examples that are both psychologically and socioeconomically unsuitable for concerned community and individuals, should be analysed.

There are examples of social security schemes that include diverse insurance engagement measures that have been adopted in African countries. For example, the respective National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and National Insurance Scheme (NIS) of Ghana and Namibia; Guinea Bissau and Tanzania with their respective Abota Village Insurance Scheme (ABIS), and Community Health Fund (CHF); and Senegal, where the finance institution PAMECAS has launched a successfully integrated micro health insurance provision into its micro loans services, with the potential of reaching 300,000 members and their families. However, such schemes may still not address the social inclusion and security concerns of those informal and rural workers who prioritize more immediate needs such as food, housing, education and health for themselves and their families.

Some traditional gender roles require men to be financially responsible for the family and for funeral rites of certain family members of the wife or spouse, thus requiring him to earn and save more towards such eventualities. Construing gender sensitive social protection measures and addressing inequalities and challenges for social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies without effective consideration of the involved community traditional nuances may be problematic and naively accepted and/or promoted by target benefiting persons and populations.

By the SPIREWORK, through which the African Union campaigns for considerate social protection measures for informal and rural economy workers, it is noteworthy that work in the informal economy is by definition, work with no social protection, thereby bringing in a critical aspect of social exclusion. Generally, less than 10% of workers in Sub-Saharan Africa have access to effective social security opportunities which are employment related contributory social protection measures, while in other developing countries 10% to 50% of workers are able to access social security. It is also considerable that in most African countries, only a small minority of people are covered by formal employment related social insurance schemes, thus leaving the larger majority of the populations behind, even though governments through the SDGs are committed to leave no-one behind. However, the African rural and informal working populations receiving social insurance benefits do so without any consultative role in assessing what social protection needs are supposed to be prioritised on a case-by-case basis, towards addressing their ethical social inclusion values.

Proposed Measures for Inclusive Social Protection Towards Social Inclusion within Traditional Societies

The social protection towers for addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies need to reflect the fundamental essence of the agenda itself, which should be a precondition to the realisation of all human rights through its capacity to empower all women, men, girls and boys to meaningfully and freely participate in social, political and economic life of their societies.

Social protection policies should acutely consider societal and community gender roles, wherein all household parties and their responsibilities with respect to considerate and accepted community norms, are addressed and, as such, regulated within their wage and fiscal social wellbeing inclusion policies and plans.

Community education and peer counselling, especially for informal or rural economy workers and their households, are undeniable tools that should complement formal education schemes, for example by combining courses of sociology and social work, economics, statistics, health and nutrition, psychology, law and public management sciences into a multi-disciplinary knowledge obtaining endeavour for enhancing social protection. This should promote inclusive and comprehensive,

interactive and interpersonal assessments and evaluations on individual understanding and perceptivity for social inclusion, towards building the social protection policies that are to benefit the individual. An exemplary ideological support and way forward could be the TRANSFORM innovative learning package initiative on the administration of national social protection floors in Africa. TRANSFORM has, as its prime objective, to build critical thinking and capacities of policy makers and practitioners at national and decentralized levels to improve the design, effectiveness and efficiency of social protection systems.

In addressing the issue of social exclusion with regards to informal or rural economy workers, firm national consolidator frameworks with the local and informal economy sectors should institutionalise comprehensive and evaluative social protection ceilings with the rural or informal economy leaders, as well as community checks and balances ombudspersons networks within such informal and local sectors. Such frameworks and ombudspersons' networks should reliably harness informal working relationships and principles within local economies and should regularly assess the individual and community social protection needs of the informal or rural economy workers.

Conclusion

To leave no-one behind also implies understanding and considering the sociocultural complexity of individuals and their communities. Efforts should therefore address and reflect the best interest of the individual.